Undergraduate Research in the Humanities – Embedded in the Curriculum
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Summary
Courses, and especially senior seminars, are the setting for most undergraduate research, past and present, in the humanities. Humanities faculty at Agnes Scott College are in the midst a project, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, that asks whether we should embed student research in the curriculum, but rather how we can make our curriculum more conducive to successful student research. This poster

a. situates Agnes Scott’s ongoing project in a national context, in part by placing our model and outcomes on the
continuum of undergraduate research practices proposed by Beckman and Hensel (2009)
and
b. provides examples from our 2012 history seminar, including student responses to our emphasis on both product and process.
Our initiatives center on three areas: preparation, process, and product.

Humanities Research Within the Curriculum
National Contexts
a. In the humanities, undergraduate research usually takes place during the academic year, as part of the student’s academic load, and as part of the faculty member’s expertise.
Senior seminars and independent senior theses are usual frameworks, and projects are usually student-initiated and faculty-mentored.

b. Research is a crucial aspect of learning for undergraduates, including the approaches, settings, and funding needs tend to differ from those in the natural sciences (Grobman, 2007; Klos et al., 2012; Humphreys, 2013). In addition, students develop and demonstrate approaches specific to their research project.

Inclusiveness of Undergraduate Research at Agnes Scott College:
All students (men, women, students)

• Faculty teach senior seminars and other research-intensive courses as part of their regular teaching load.

• Most students have access, and motivation.

• Most humanities majors require a senior research seminar, although there is no institutional requirement that every student complete a research project.

Benefits of embedding research in the curriculum
• Most students have access, and motivation.

• Faculty teach senior seminars and other research-intensive courses as part of their regular teaching load.

• A student-faculty ratio of 11:1 ensures that faculty work with students individually.

• Most humanities majors require a senior research seminar, although there is no institutional requirement that every student complete a research project.

Evolution of Goals U R in the Humanities
a. Competencies: Develop skills in locating and evaluating information from multiple sources, evidence-based analysis, written and oral communication, critical reading and thinking. These skills or competencies, essential for successful research in the humanities, are also at the top of the list of learning outcomes desired by employers.
(Hart Research Associates, 2013; Humphreys, 2013). In addition, students develop and demonstrate approaches specific to their disciplines.

b. Capabilities: Develop the sense of empowerment and agency that comes from making a problem one’s own and addressing it in a timely and persuasive way. Promote "creative participation in and ownership of knowledge" and "learning as a way of life" (Loucks, 2012, 7-13.) Learn to be a critical thinker, a complex project to completion. This includes overcoming obstacles and accepting criticism. Establish a disciplinary identity.

• We seek to make research stimulating, challenging, and meaningful for students who will pursue a variety of career paths. We know that only a small percentage of our graduates will pursue PhDs in the discipline of their major.

Research in Agnes Scott’s senior seminar in history:

Student, process centered
Outcome, product centered

Students, in articulating their goals at the beginning of the history senior seminar, often referred both to product and process: “I want my final paper to be a very good research paper and I have published my research skills. I want to learn how to research and write a fairly long research paper in addition to helping myself organize.” In addition, they want to have the opportunity to pursue their own research interests and share their findings. “A critical thinking class that will help me improve my writing skills.” “I would like to express my appreciation to the students in the 2012 history senior seminar at Agnes Scott College, and to Drew Homa of the Office of Communications for their encouragement and support.”

PRODUCT - What are the expectations for students’ final projects? Who is the audience for them?
The 2012 Agnes Scott history senior seminar were a 20-25 page paper, a 20-30 minute presentation for classmates, mentors, and friends, and, for some students, presentation at the college’s Spring Annual Research Conference, which took place the semester ended. Several students expanded their projects into full-scale senior theses during the spring semester. One presented her work to a local historical society. Other students presented their work to a local historical society.

Counsellor/Community audience → Professional audience

PREPARATION – How, over the course of the major, do we prepare students for senior-level research?

a. Review, reframe or introduce methods course, usually taken during the sophomore or junior year, with a central focus on teaching students both to undertake research in the major discipline, and to embrace it.

b. Curriculum mapping and revision, with the goal of sustaining research projects and identifying research opportunities at all levels.

b. Pre-seminar mentoring. During the spring of the junior year prior to the senior seminar, each history major is assigned a faculty mentor and a librarian mentor. She meets with both several times during the spring and summer and has ongoing communication with the semester. The Mellon grant is providing small stipends to faculty to support this extra level of engagement and learning at every stage? How can students best reflect on their work.

Comments from history students about faculty mentors:
• “My mentor was extremely helpful, supportive, and encouraging.”
• “Student partner was very encouraging. Enjoyed sharing troubles and good finds.”
• “The class was great help and support.”
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• “So glad to have had a faculty mentor.”

• Faculty mentor offered not only guidance and helpful suggestions but also a great deal of encouragement and support.
• “I aimed to have a piece of work that shows how far I’ve come in these four years and that I can be proud
• “I was supported by a high priority of the Catalan government, TV 3, established in 1983, has received very little scholarly

Catalan Nationalism in the Post-Franco Period: “The Good Widow” and a Family of Dissenters, by Anna Williams

“Through her own family
During the American Civil War, Williams used unpublished, unstained letters exchanged by a Georgia couple during the civil war to contribute to our understanding of the wartime domestic economy for families of modest means, in contrast with the more widely studied planter class.

What did you learn in the senior seminar?
Students’ responses to this question at the end of the history senior seminar:

• I have learned how to write something I can be proud of and I have published my research skills.

• I have learned how to research and write a fairly long research paper in addition to helping myself organize.

• I have learned how to space out work to manage other parts of my life.

• I have learned how to engage with a topic and logically and coherently express its significance.

• More than anything, I have learned how to do serious, focused research in a way that is not possible in other classes.

• How to give and receive criticism well, how to see flaws in my own methods, research.

• I have learned about my own academic endowment, imagination, and how to give and receive criticism well, and how to see flaws in my own methods, research.

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